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## SHORT NOTES

### Freshwater Turtles of the Top End

Species diversity tends to be greater in the tropics and this certainly seems to be the case for Australian freshwater turtles. On 19 September 1987 during a turtle catching trip on the Daly River upstream of Policeman's Crossing, we counted five species of turtle in one short stretch of river. Although we have dived and trapped extensively in rivers and lakes in southern Australia, we have never found more than two or three species in the same waterbody. The distribution maps of Australian turtles (Cogger, H. 1985. *Reptiles and Amphibians of Australia*. Reed, Sydney) reflect this increased species diversity in northern Australia.

Operating from a boat with a spotlight at night we encountered several Northern Long-necked Turtles *Chelodina rugosa* resting on submerged logs, their necks curled in preparation for striking at unwary prey. Northern Snappers *Eelseya dentata* were common, and shared the deeper water around snags with male-female pairs of Red-faced *Emydura victoriae* and Yellow-faced *Emydura "australis"* short-necked turtles. The Daly River is the only river in Australia where two species of *Emydura* coexist. We were also lucky to see the rare Pig-nosed Turtle *Carettochelys insculpta*.

We caught our target of ten short-necked turtles within the first hour, then spent several more enjoyable hours watching turtles swim around submerged logs and trees and adding to our species count. Our progress along the river was punctuated by loud splashes as startled freshwater crocodiles *Crocodylus johnstoni* made desperate leaps from the high banks. Tropical rivers certainly come alive at night and meandering along a river armed only with a spotlight provides an unforgettable experience.

ROD KENNETT, Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory

P.O. Box 496, Palmerston, NT, 0831

ARTHUR GEORGES, School of Applied Science, Canberra C.A.E.

P.O. Box 1, Belconnen, ACT, 2616

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